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Economic Development Workshop Informs and Inspires Downtown Planners

February, 2013, Romeoville, Illinois – For nearly forty local leaders, economic development planners, tourism destination operators and business owners, a recent Downtown Revitalization Workshop offered a full menu of strategies to attract businesses and business. The day-long working session was facilitated by commercial revitalization specialist Lauren Adkins, a Washington, D.C.-based expert who has helped over 100 towns in nearly 40 states. The workshop was hosted by the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) with the National Trust for Historic Preservation-The Gaylord Building.

Participants represented four counties and a dozen communities along the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. Small business owners joined municipal planners and elected officials to roll up their sleeves and focus on driving business and tourism.

According to one participant, Grundy County District 2 Board Member Tyrel Lundeen, the program provided something for everyone. "It served its purpose as a forum for participants to learn about proven strategies, and address common challenges," said Lundeen. "I really appreciated the opportunity to network with others, exchange ideas and discuss solutions" she reported. Lundeen, who has been a retail business owner, said she fully understands the issues of getting a business started and keeping the doors open.

Discussing her responsibility to the greater Grundy County region, Lundeen said, "One of my goals is to bring more job opportunities to the County, which we know is all about attracting people to downtown businesses." She expressed pride in her role as a representative of the Heritage Corridor. "We have so much to offer the residents and tourists all year long. The better the downtowns look, and the more activities for residents and tourists to enjoy, the healthier the businesses are." "As a result," she continued, "tourism efforts will attract businesses small and large to our communities, and more job opportunities will be made available."

For the Heritage Corridor CVB, strategic planning sessions succeed when local partners are committed to continuously improving their regions as prime destinations for locals and for visitors. "We are grateful to the professionals whose participation in our Main Street Workshop will help drive economic development Corridor-wide," said Heritage Corridor CVB President/CEO Bob Navarro. "Focusing on how to boost business in our downtown areas will continue to draw visitors to shop, dine and enjoy all these great Corridor towns offer," he continued. In expressing gratitude to the CVB members and partners in attendance, Navarro said he was pleased with the event's outcome, and grateful to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's support.

Next up for the Heritage Corridor CVB? The Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism. Set for Wednesday, February 27 thru Friday, March 1, the annual event is being chaired, for the second consecutive year, by President/CEO Bob Navarro. He encourages local business owners and destination operators to attend. Information on the 2-day Conference, as well as online registration (open until Friday, February 22, with on site registration accepted during the event), is available at www.ilgovconference.com.

The Heritage Corridor CVB generates economic impact among the communities and counties along the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. For additional information, a listing of members, or schedule of activities and events, contact the Heritage Corridor CVB at 800/926-CANAL (2262), stop into any of the Visitors Centers, or go to the updated website at www.heritagecorridor.cvb.

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